



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

## Conservation Reserve Program

### Authorization

The Food Security Act of 1985, as amended, authorized the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which is implemented through the Farm Service Agency (FSA) on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). The program is also governed by the regulations published in 7 CFR part 1410.

### Overview

The CRP is a voluntary program that offers annual rental payments, incentive payments, and annual maintenance payments for certain activities, and cost-share assistance to establish approved cover on eligible cropland.

The program encourages farmers to plant long-term resource-conserving covers to improve soil, water, and wildlife resources. CCC makes available cost-share assistance in an amount equal to not more than 50 percent of the participant's costs in establishing approved practices. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.

CRP is administered by FSA. The Natural Resources Conservation Service, Cooperative State Research and Education Extension Service, state forestry agencies, and local soil and water conservation districts provide

technical support. Private sector technical assistance vendors may also be available.

### Eligible Land

To be eligible for placement in the CRP land must be:

- Cropland that is planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity 2 of the 5 most recent crop years (including field margins) and which is physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity; or
- Marginal pastureland that is either:
  - Certain acreage enrolled in the Water Bank Program; or
  - Suitable for use as a riparian buffer to be planted to trees.

### Additional Requirements for Cropland

In addition to the eligible land requirements, cropland must meet one of the following:

1. Have a weighted average Erosion Index (EI) of 8 or higher or be considered highly erodible land according to the conservation compliance provisions;
2. Be considered a cropped wetland;

3. Be devoted to any of a number of highly beneficial environmental practices, such as filter strips, riparian buffers, grass waterways, shelterbelts, wellhead protection areas, and other similar practices;
4. Be subject to scour erosion;
5. Be located in a national or state CRP conservation priority area;
6. Be cropland associated with or surrounding noncropped wetlands.

### Ranking Criteria

Offers for CRP contracts are ranked according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI).

The designated technical agency collects data for each of the EBI factors, based upon the relative environmental benefits for the land offered. Each eligible offer is ranked in comparison to all others and selections made from that ranking.

EBI factors include:

- Wildlife habitat benefits resulting from covers on contract acreage;
- Water quality benefits from reduced erosion, runoff, and leaching;
- On-farm benefits of reduced erosion;
- Benefits that will likely endure beyond the contract period;

- Air quality benefits from reduced wind erosion;
- Benefits of enrollment in conservation priority areas where enrollment would contribute to the improvement of identified adverse water quality, wildlife habitat, or air quality; and
- Cost.

### ***Producer Eligibility Requirements***

A producer must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to close of the signup period, unless:

- The new owner acquired the land as a result of death of the previous owner;
- The only ownership change occurred due to foreclosure where the owner exercised a timely right of redemption in accordance with state law; or
- The circumstances of the acquisition present adequate assurance to CCC that the new owner did not acquire the land for the purpose of placing it in CRP.

### ***Rental Rates***

The CCC bases rental rates on the relative productivity of soils within each county and the average dryland cash rent or the cash-rent equivalent.

The maximum CRP rental rate for each offer is calculated in advance of enrollment. Producers may offer land at that rate or may offer a

lower rental rate to increase the likelihood that their offer will be accepted.

In addition, CCC offers additional financial incentives of up to 20 percent of the annual payment for certain continuous signup practices.

### ***Other Payments***

The CCC encourages restoration of wetlands by offering a one-time incentive payment equal to 25 percent of the cost of restoring the hydrology of the site. This is in addition to the 50-percent cost share provided to establish approved cover.

### ***Continuous Signup***

Eligible acreage devoted to certain special conservation practices, such as riparian buffers, filter strips, grass waterways, shelterbelts, living snow fences, contour grass strips, salt tolerant vegetation, and shallow water areas for wildlife, may be enrolled at any time under the CCC's continuous signup and are not subject to competitive bidding. In addition, land within a designated public wellhead area may be eligible to be enrolled on a continuous basis. (*See FSA Fact Sheet: "Continuous Signup for High-Priority Practices" for further details.*)

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